

State of the City of Kingston 2009

President Noble
Members of the Common Council
Community Members:

Before I review the state of the city of Kingston this year, I first want to reflect on the gratitude I feel for the people of this community. No matter what challenges we have faced or what the future brings, we have always drawn strength from each other. In this small, tight-knit community, that means everything.

Our rich history is woven together by its people. From Sojourner Truth to George Clinton to the modern day heroes of Kingston, who care for the children, drive the busses and pick up the garbage, we can be grateful. I am certain of this because for 350 years the good people of Kingston get up each morning, work hard, support their families, and most of all help each other.

We begin this year in the midst of a national financial crisis, the duration and severity of which is unknown. Unemployment rates are staggering, businesses are closing and Americans are suffering. Equally as alarming, our state faces an enormous deficit. The national government has a deficit of over \$10 trillion dollars and New York State has a deficit of \$15 billion, both increasing daily.

We can expect, therefore, marked decreases in federal and state aid and a marked decrease in county sales tax revenues, resulting in a projected loss of \$1.1 million to the city of Kingston. Although we are encountering these difficult financial problems, we as a city are economically sound.

Through a lengthy budget process, that included healthy debate, you have adopted a budget for 2009 that presents many challenges. It incorporates the trimming of expenses and the consolidating of some jobs that will pay off in cumulative savings.

The budget surplus is like saving for a rainy day and that rain has begun to fall. That surplus must be maintained for tomorrow's difficulties are uncertain. We must continue to act in a fiscally prudent manner now, and in the future, by trying to maintain a strong fund balance rather than falling into serious deficit spending.

On the Rondout oil tanks have been removed, property cleared and research has been done on Brownfield remediation in this area. A grant of \$408,000 was awarded for this by DEC and the Department of State.

Armor Dynamics has completed a 10,000 square foot building in our industrial park. This building is owned by the Kingston Local Development Corporation, where the primary funding came through a one million dollar grant from Senator Larkin.

The Waterfront Promenade Project, to be completed this fall, includes the reconstruction of the bulkhead, the construction of a paved walkway, new lighting, benches, landscaping and other amenities. Through Congressman's Hinchey's efforts, over one million dollars has been awarded to our community for this project.

In addition to these improvements, new facades are being designed for the trolley museum and the sewer treatment plant, as well as a new Day line dock.

In 2008 the Kirkland Hotel was completed and is occupied by residents and professional businesses. This historic structure was reborn as result of a public/private partnership. Although the process was challenging, its success depended on the cooperative efforts of numerous agencies and funding sources. This treasure stands as an example of what Kingston once was and is; a community of hard working, tenacious people who tell a story through their cherished landmarks.

New York City DEP has completed their 35 million dollar building project in the heart of our city, where 200 employees are working each day.

Also in midtown the Broadway design guidelines have been adopted, which represent a vision for our business corridor.

The newly constructed Quick check not only provides new jobs and business in Kingston, it brings with it the removal of a blighted building.

We continue to make progress in many areas including; repair of our infrastructure, clean up of Brownfield's, refurbishment of the uptown streetscape, demolition of the uptown parking garage, the formation of a Kingston land conservancy, improvements to our nature center, and the anticipated restoration of the Carnegie Library.

The environmental review process for Hudson Landing has finally been completed. It has been six years of tireless work by The Kingston planning board, chaired by Lee Molyneaux and the planning office. I want to thank these folks, as well as the community groups, who took the time to voice their support and

objections so we could form the best possible plan for the use of our most valued land along the Hudson River.

A recent initiative in Kingston, with a positive environmental impact, involves a new way of handling solid waste. A sludge burner has been installed at our treatment plant, which converts waste into usable fertilizer. We have been recognized by the Department of Environmental Conservation for being the first in the nation, for a community of this size, to utilize this green technology within a public private partnership. It has also provided a cost savings by minimizing the transport of waste out of the area. I will be traveling on behalf of this city to New York City tomorrow to receive another award for this project from The New York Water Environment Association. With all of these new projects before us, we still maintain our day to day operations in Kingston

In the area of law enforcement, for example, our number one challenge over the past few years has been reducing serious crime. Our strategy involved working with Operation Impact, which gave us extra resources for the past two years to use police officers in a proactive capacity. In addition we worked with URGENT, a task force of investigators who concentrate on drug and gang related activity in Kingston and throughout the county. We also asked the State Police and Sheriff's department to assist us in patrolling the streets, focusing on quality of life crimes. These efforts have paid off with a reduction in crime in both 2008 and 2009. I want to thank Chief Keller, and his force, for working cooperatively with other agencies to meet our goal. Our challenge in going forward will be to maintain this trend with the budget cuts we are facing.

This year I would like focus attention on attracting web and digital entrepreneurs to Kingston. We will brand ourselves "The Upstate Digital Tech-friendly City." New resident, Mark Green states, "Web entrepreneurs will find Kingston attractive due to the price point of real estate and the slightly more urban quality Kingston offers." I couldn't agree with him more. Kingston has Emmy and Grammy award-winning micro-business owners living and working here. This new effort will enhance our art-friendly atmosphere and mix a perfect blend of art and technology in a small city environment.

In the near future the City of Kingston website will be modified to include a tech-friendly component, inviting micro and mid-sized web companies to visit Kingston. Another step on this path will include fostering the creation of a Kingston Digital Business Association to oversee the implementation of our tech-friendly plan.

The coming year is expected to present many unprecedented challenges throughout our world, our nation, and in our local community. Our new President, Barack Obama, has called Americans to service. He has asked us to consider how we can help our nation both in the military and in civilian pursuits.

As Mayor of the City of Kingston, I would like to extend that invitation to our local residents. I am asking each Kingstonian to respond this call. Please consider volunteering some time in your community. We need you. If you can only give an hour of your time, check on an elderly neighbor, sweep a sidewalk or pick up some litter. If you can do more, become a mentor or literacy volunteer. Perhaps you would like to join in the effort to plant a victory garden. We will be planting one here at City Hall. Community organizer Rebecca Martin has planned this for the spring.

Could you contribute to Queen's Galley Soup Kitchen, which provides three meals a day to needy families? Alderwoman DiBella can assist you if you are interested in helping a homeless family. Have you tried reaching a hand out to a young person at the Boys and Girls Club? This list is endless. This experience can be a defining moment for you and I can assure you your efforts will pay off both collectively and by way of personal gratification.

Our ability to connect one Kingstonian with another, defines us as a "tight-knit" community. We have been woven into a tapestry of diverse people who are there for one-another. We celebrate together, face our challenges together and bring hope to one another. Let this be a year of support and hope. And let it be a year in which each of us confronts our problems and voices our opinions regarding solutions. In the words of Thomas Paine "You will do me the justice to remember, that I have always strenuously supported the Right of every man to his opinion, however different that opinion might be to mine. He who denies to another this right, makes a slave of himself to his present opinion, because he precludes himself the right of changing it." ¹ And in change may be the solution. God bless The Great City of Kingston and God bless America.

¹ Paine, Thomas, The Age of Reason; New York: Dover Publications, 2004 page VII.